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THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN WASATCH COUNTY

A living faith--a faith that literally moved mountains of colonizing problems, mountains of tragedy, sorrow and hardship and yet brought with it mountains of joy--characterized the lives of pioneer settlers in Heber City and Wasatch County.

They came for many reasons, but each possessed a pioneering spirit and each heart burned with the desire to carve from the earth a piece of freedom--freedom from want and freedom to worship God.

Theirs was a faith that had spurred them to move from other areas into this new frontier land where they had to wrestle with the soil and the elements for new homes, new farms and a new kind of life. It was a faith that moved them to great spiritual works. They found no established meeting houses, well organized and conveniently operating, when they came. They had to build their own building, provide their own leadership and work hard to bring righteousness into their area. This they did, and did it with a determined faith that would not allow them to sacrifice the precious religious heritage that had brought them to this land and that sustained them each day of their lives.

It is believed that the first white men to travel through this area were Catholic Priests. Between this visit in the summer of 1776 and the beginnings of settlements in 1858 only hunters and trappers frequented the area in search of beaver and mink. Often they followed the trails and footpaths worn into the earth by Indians.

During the spring of 1859 the first permanent settlers had crossed to the eastern slopes of the Wasatch Mountains to establish homes and farms in the valleys of the Provo River headwaters. These settlers were all members of the Church, encouraged by Pres. Brigham Young to colonize the outlying areas of the Territory of Deseret.

Before the original group left Provo City in 1859 to go to what was then called Provo Valley, William Meeks had been appointed as their leader. He never established a home in the valley and so early in the spring of 1860 William Madison Wall was appointed as presiding elder in the valley. Since all those in the valley were Latter-day Saints they looked to their Church leaders as legislative and judicial officials also.

In that first year the struggles of settling a new land challenged the stamina and faith of even the most hardy pioneers. Yet their physical courage and spiritual strength enabled them to lay the foundation of a valley that has been marked during the years by peace, modest prosperity and abiding spirituality.

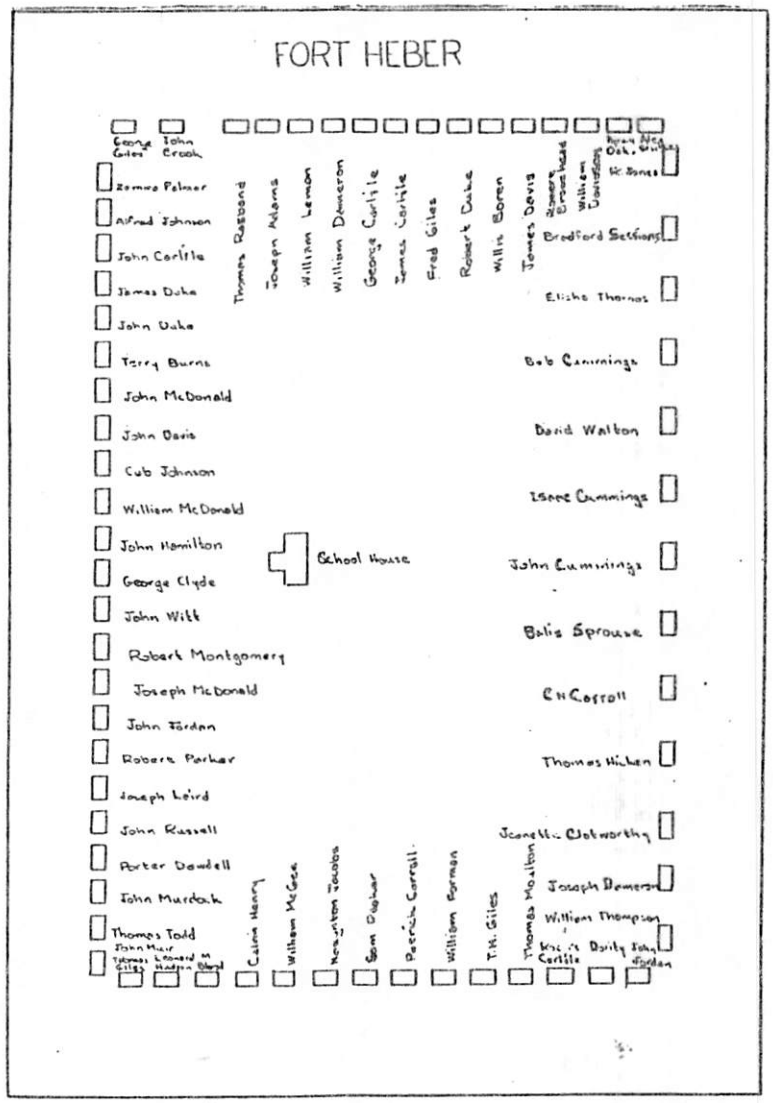
As the little settlement sank its roots deeper into the Wasatch soil the need for a permanent name became apparent. Out of this need grew the name Heber City.

According to the journal of John Crook nearly all the early pioneers of the valley had been converted to the gospel in Great Britian. Since Heber C. Kimball, beloved counselor to Pres. Brigham Young, had been in charge of the first group of missionaries to the British Isles, there was popular acclaim to name the town after him.

When he learned of the decision, Pres. Kimball came to town and met with the people. In his remarks he is reported to have said: "Now you people have named your little town after me. I want you to see to it that you are honest, upright citizens and good Latter-day Saints that I may not have cause to be ashamed of you."

As the settlers laid out a townsite in 1859, they decided to build closer together in a fort so they could protect themselves from Indians if that became necessary. They selected the northwest corner of the townsite for the fort string of huts lying between what is now First West and Fourth West Streets and Second North and Fifth North Streets.

By Barbara M Moulton



Old Fort Heber showing the locations of the families who built their homes there in 1859.

The first chapel, a log structure 20x40 feet built inside the fort, was built in time for the Pioneer Day celebration, July 24, 1860, and served the saints for nearly five years. This structure would serve not only as a church but also as a school building, a dance hall, a theater and for all kinds of community gatherings.

As the Saints sat in the log meeting house they raised their voices in song and prayer, expressing humble appreciation for the blessings they had been given by God.

By the time spring was welcomed in 1861, Heber was recognized by Church leaders in Salt Lake City as being large enough to organize into a ward. Thus, early in 1861 Joseph S. Murdock was ordained as bishop of the new ward by Pres. Young.

Bishop Murdock also served as presiding bishop of the valley and directed the Church efforts of presiding elders who were called in the small communities that had begun to spring up in the valley.

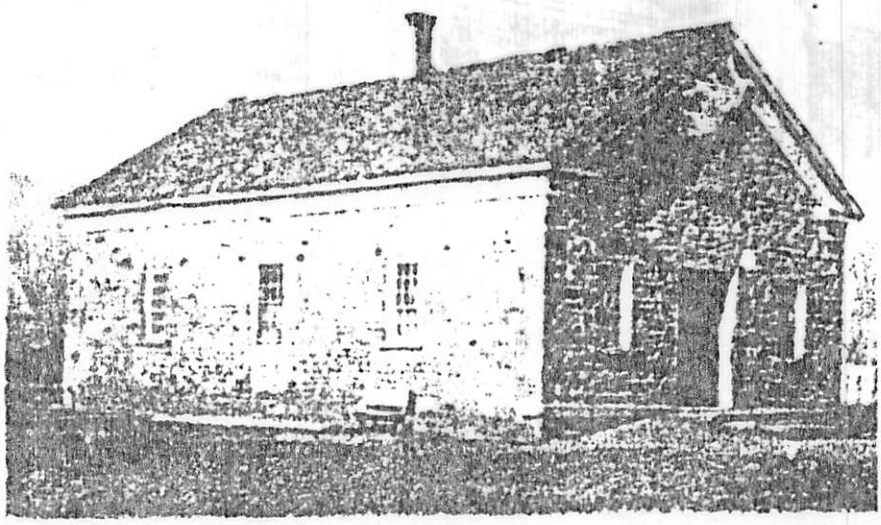
Then in 1877 the area had grown sufficiently that the Church officials decided to organize a stake in the area, which took place on July 14 and 15, 1877.

Bishop Abram Hatch, who had succeeded Bp. Murdock, was called as the first stake president. Wasatch Stake, as organized, extended into Uintah County on the east, north into what is now Summit County, and covered all of Wasatch County. Starting in 1903 other stakes were organized in Summit and Uintah counties.

Other Wasatch Stake presidents during the time it existed have been: William H. Smart, Joseph R. Murdock, David A. Broadbent, H. Clay Cummings, J. Harold Call and Robert F. Clyde.

At the same time when Wasatch Stake was organized in 1877, Heber Ward was divided into two wards with all those living east of Main Street included in the East Ward, with Thomas Rasband ordained as Bishop, and all those west of Main Street in the West Ward with William Forman ordained as Bishop.

Other Bishops of Heber East Ward were Robert S. Duke and Robert Duke.



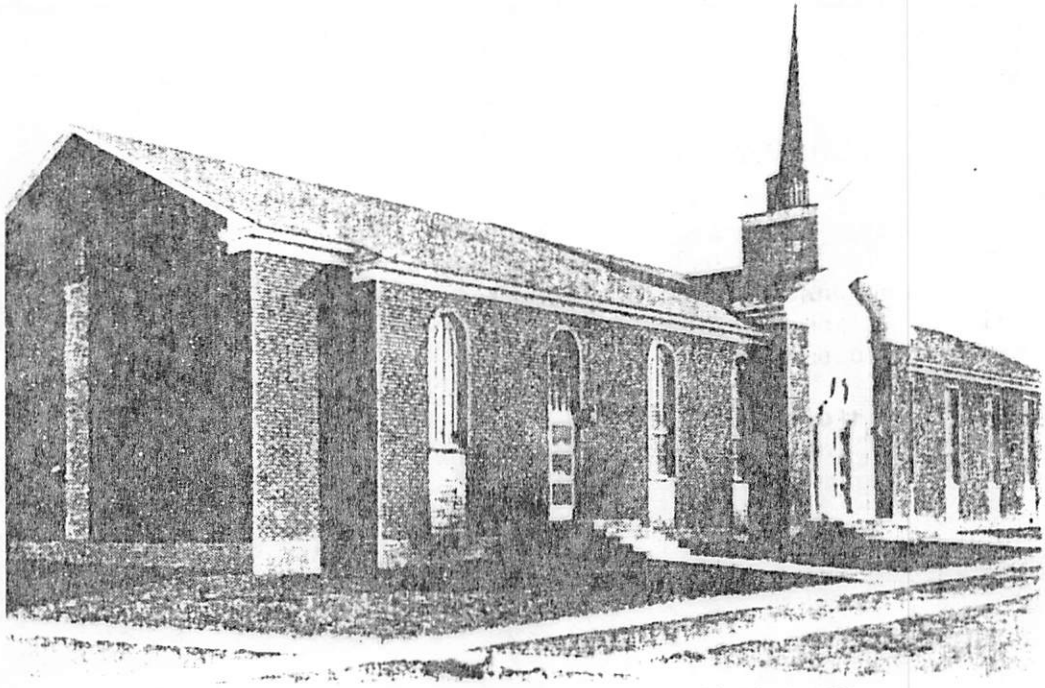
A red sandstone building located in the north east section of town was used both for school and church functions. It served as the first meeting house of the Heber East Ward, and then the First Ward.

The Heber First Ward Chapel dedicated December 26, 1915 at 325 E. 200 N.

The year 1903 was important in the history of Heber City for in that year the two Heber Wards were dissolved and three new wards were created under the direction of Pres. William H. Smart on February 8, 1903.

Robert Duke, former bishop of the Heber East Ward, was sustained as the first bishop of the new Heber First Ward. Joseph A. Rasband was selected as bishop of the Second Ward and Frederick Crook was called as the bishop of the new Third Ward.

Other bishops of the Heber First Ward have been: George Frank Ryan, George B. Stanley, Joseph A. Olpin, Heber M. Rasband, Harold H. Smith, Ervin J. Anderson, George Holmes, Larry B. Duke, Michael J. Moulton, Ralph L. Duke and Charles J. Jenkins.



The new Heber First-Sixth Ward Chapel dedicated March 11, 1953.

Under the direction of Bp. Heber M. Rasband a decision was made to remodel and expand the Heber First Ward chapel. The expansion work began in 1952 and the beautiful, modern chapel was dedicated by Elder Harold B. Lee in 1953. During the construction period church services were held in the hall above the fire engine garage at 37 East 100 North in Heber City.

Our present beautiful chapel for the Heber 1st-6th-9th Wards was built in 1980 and started use the first Sunday of January in 1981.

Wasatch Stake Seminary Building

A seminary program in conjunction with high school was begun in 1918 and was first taught at the Heber Third Ward, then moved to a vacant room at the High School. Construction was started on a new Seminary building in 1925 next to the High School at 212 So. Main and classes were held there until the buildings were torn down and the new school and seminary started classes in their present location.

On June 16, 1974 Wasatch Stake was divided into two stakes, Heber Utah Stake with Reed Ford appointed as President and Heber East Stake with Robert F. Clyde as President. Harvey G. Horner currently serves in the Heber Utah Stake. Larry B. Duke succeeded Robert F. Clyde in the Heber East Stake and Michael J. Moulton is currently serving.

The third stake organized in the valley was the Midway Utah Stake on Mar. 27, 1983. Wayne W. Probst was sustained as President and serves to the present time. There are six wards in each stake with a total membership of approx. 8500 to 9000 members.

Report researched and prepared by Barbara Moulton
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